

## What is a crucible?

A crucible has three definitions (one that is more literal, one that is more figurative). For each of the definitions, describe how the definition applies to the play (a plot incident, character, situation, idea or message that shows this meaning of crucible)

- A vessel used for melting materials at high temperatures.
- A severe test, as of patience or belief; a trial.
- A place, time, or situation characterized by the joining of powerful intellectual, social, economic, or political forces

In Act IV, Danforth tells Proctor:

**Now, Mr. Proctor, before I decide whether I shall hear you or not, it is my duty to tell you this. We burn a hot fire here; it melts down all concealment.**

In what ways might this line from Danforth be ironic as it comes from Danforth but sincere in that it comes from Miller – what concealment do you hope gets burned away by the end of the play?

## What is a tragedy?

For each of the characteristics of a tragedy, describe how an aspect of the play (an plot incident, a character, symbol, idea or message) fulfills this characteristic of a tragedy

- **Tragedy:** A serious play in which the main character or tragic hero, by some flaw of character, passes through a series of misfortunes leading to a final, devastating catastrophe.
- **Tragic Hero:** A character of high rank, social status and honor whose tragic flaw leads to his downfall.
- **Tragic Flaw:** The downfall of the tragic hero comes from a flaw in character or personality, an error in judgment, or fate – or the combination of the three.
- **Catharsis:** catharsis is a feeling of "emotional purging" that an audience feels after witnessing the plight of a tragic hero: we feel emotionally drained, but triumphant; we feel relieved that life has been restored through the death (sacrifice) of the tragic hero. Often the tragic hero experiences a moment of enlightenment before his death.

# Tragedy and the Common Man by Arthur Miller

In the margins please note at least three ways that Miller's view of the tragic hero makes you see John Proctor as the tragic hero. Be prepared to discuss the play as a tragedy and how we, as an audience undergo, catharsis by the end of the play

In this age few tragedies are written. It has often been held that the lack is due to a [scarcity] of heroes among us, or else that modern man has had the blood drawn out of his organs of belief by the skepticism of science, and the heroic attack on life cannot feed on an attitude of reserve and circumspection. For one reason or another, we are often held to be below tragedy--or tragedy above us. The inevitable conclusion is, of course, that the tragic mode is archaic, fit only for the very highly placed, the kings or the kingly, and where this admission is not made in so many words it is most often implied.

I believe that the common man is as apt a subject for tragedy in its highest sense as kings were.... As a general rule, to which there may be exceptions unknown to me, I think the tragic feeling is evoked in us when we are in the presence of a character who is ready to lay down his life, if need be, to secure one thing--his sense of personal dignity. From Orestes to Hamlet, Medea to Macbeth, the underlying struggle is that of the individual attempting to gain his "rightful" position in his society.

Sometimes he is one who has been displaced from it, sometimes one who seeks to attain it for the first time, but the fateful wound from which the inevitable events spiral is the wound of indignity, and its dominant force is indignation. Tragedy, then, is the consequence of a man's total compulsion to evaluate himself justly.

In the sense of having been initiated by the hero himself, the tale always reveals what has been called his "tragic flaw," a failing that is not peculiar to grand or elevated characters. Nor is it necessarily a weakness. The flaw, or crack in the character, is really nothing--and need be nothing -- but his inherent unwillingness to remain passive in the face of what he conceives to be a challenge to his dignity, his image of his rightful status. Only the passive, only those who accept their lot without active retaliation, are "flawless." Most of us are in that category.

But there are among us today, as there always have been, those who act against the scheme of things that degrades them, and in the process of action, everything we have accepted out of fear or insensitivity or ignorance is shaken before us and examined, and from this total onslaught by an individual against the seemingly stable cosmos surrounding us--from this total examination of the "unchangeable" environment--comes the terror and the fear that is classically associated with tragedy.

More important, from this total questioning of what has been previously unquestioned, we learn. And such a process is not beyond the common man. In revolutions around the world, these past thirty years, he has demonstrated again and again this inner dynamic of all tragedy...

Now, if it is true that tragedy is the consequence of a man's total compulsion to evaluate himself justly, his destruction in the attempt posits a wrong or an evil in his environment. And this is precisely the morality of tragedy and its lesson. The discovery of the moral law, which is what the enlightenment of tragedy consists of, is not the discovery of some abstract or metaphysical quantity.

The tragic right is a condition of life, a condition in which the human personality is able to flower and realize itself. The wrong is the condition which suppresses man, perverts the flowing out of his love and, creative instinct. Tragedy enlightens--and it must, in that it points the heroic finger at the enemy, of man's freedom. The thrust for freedom is the quality in tragedy which exalts. The revolutionary questioning of the stable environment is what terrifies. In no way is the common man debarred from such thoughts or such actions.

I think the tragic feeling is evoked in us when we are in the presence of a character who is ready to lay down his life, if need be, to secure one thing--his sense of personal dignity.

Seen in this light, our lack of tragedy may be partially accounted for by the turn which modern literature has taken toward the purely psychiatric view of life, or the purely sociological. If all our miseries, our indignities, are born and bred within our minds, then all action, let alone the heroic action, is obviously impossible.

And if society alone is responsible for the cramping of our lives, then the protagonist must be so pure and faultless as to force us to deny his validity as a character. From neither of these views can tragedy derive, simply because neither represents a

balanced concept of life. Above all else, tragedy requires the finest appreciation by the writer of cause and effect....

For, if it is true to say that in essence the tragic hero is intent upon claiming his whole due as a personality, and if this struggle must be total and without reservation, then it automatically demonstrates the indestructible will of man to achieve his humanity.

The possibility of victory must be there in tragedy. Where pathos rules, where pathos is finally derived, a character has fought a battle he could not possibly have won. The pathetic is achieved when the protagonist is, by virtue of his witlessness, his insensitivity, or the very air he gives off, incapable of grappling with a much superior force.

Pathos truly is the mode for the pessimist. But tragedy requires a nicer balance between what is possible and what is impossible. And it is curious, although edifying, that the plays we revere, century after century, are the tragedies. In them, and in them alone, lies the belief -- optimistic, if you will -- in the perfectibility of man.

It is time, I think, that we who are without kings took up this bright thread of our history and followed it to the only place it can possibly lead in our time--the heart and spirit of the average man.